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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Washington D.C. 20520

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Dear Mr. Siljander:

The President has asked that I reply to your letter of July 15 regarding the sale of AWACS and F-15 enhancement items to Saudi Arabia. As you know, the Administration plans to make a strong case for the proposal in testimony to the Congress in the near future. In the interim, I will try to address the specific issues you have raised.

The President is convinced that providing Saudi Arabia with this equipment will improve the security of our friends, strengthen our own posture in the region, and make it clear both to local governments and to the Soviet leadership that the United States is determined to assist in preserving security and stability in Southwest Asia. While ownership and immediate control of the aircraft will be in Saudi hands, Saudi operation of AWACS will depend on U.S. maintenance and logistics support for the life of the system. The Saudi government, like other governments, recognizes that as a sovereign nation it has both the right and the duty to defend its own population and territory to the greatest extent possible without being dependent on foreign help. The Saudis have sound political reasons for wanting to minimize an overt U.S. military presence in their country. It is very much in our interest to respect this preference.

If the Saudis were confronted with only a U.S. leasing option, they could and likely would turn elsewhere to purchase airborne early warning aircraft. It would mean a loss of control and influence if another country or countries replaced the U.S. as Saudi Arabia's major arms supplier and would not be in our interest or Israel's.

We do not believe that transfer of control of the aircraft will jeopardize U.S. security. Although AWACS technology is still sensitive, it is in fact four years older than when a sale of AWACS was proposed for Iran. Detailed AWACS technology has been released to NATO, and Israel and Japan have received the E2C which contains some comparable technology. Saudi AWACS will not include a number of the advanced systems in U.S. AWACS.

The Honorable
Mark D. Siljander,
House of Representatives.

Finally, it should be noted that the Soviets are already flying a system which gives them an airborne surveillance capability. A new Soviet aircraft is under development and is expected to be operating quite soon which will have a capability similar to our 20-year-old AWACS technology.

Substantial training by U.S. military and civilian personnel will be required before Saudi Arabian Air Force personnel will be capable of full operation of the AWACS and its related equipment, and some U.S. contractor personnel support will be required for the life of the system. Saudi AWACS will be flown and operated by Saudi crews.

The data gathered by AWACS is primarily of an immediate, tactical nature, with an extremely short duration. AWACS does not gather strategic data; it has no photo or electronic intelligence collection capability.

The Saudi Arabian Government has been one of the most stable regimes in the Middle East during the present century. The Ruling Family has maintained close ties to the religious establishment, the military, and other key groups within the Kingdom. Through the traditional institution of the Majlis, Saudi citizens have a direct, meaningful access to their political system. Along with the distribution of some 3000 Princes throughout various walks of life, this system has kept the regime in close contact with its people and contributed to the absence of any significant organized opposition within the country or abroad. We do not believe that the military equipment we will be transferring to Saudi Arabia is subject to a threat derived from internal instability.

The Saudis recognize that we are offering to sell them advanced equipment which incorporated sophisticated technology. They therefore have agreed to work with us to develop mutually satisfactory security arrangements.

Israel, as mentioned, already possesses the E2C aerial surveillance aircraft. This same system is used by the U.S. Navy and remains a current, modern, and effective system. The purpose of the AWACS sale is to enable Saudi Arabia to defend its highly vulnerable oil facilities -- which are of crucial importance to the United States and its allies -- from air attack.

The United States has not asked for, and the Saudis have not made any promises regarding future Saudi support for U.S. policies in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has traditionally followed similar policies as the United States regarding most issues. At many points, they have supported U.S. efforts to mediate between the Arabs and Israel. Although they have found themselves unable to accept the agreements reached through the Camp David process, they have consistently represented a moderate Arab viewpoint, and have recently reaffirmed their support for a peaceful solution to the conflict based upon United Nations resolutions.

The Government of Saudi Arabia has assured us that it will use U.S.-supplied equipment only for defensive purposes. We believe we can rely on these assurances. The Saudi Government recognizes that we would view the use of U.S.-supplied equipment of any sort against Israel as a matter of the utmost gravity.

I hope this information has been of assistance in clarifying this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Fairbanks
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

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July 31, 1981

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Dear Mr. Siljander:

This is to acknowledge and thank you for your July 15 letter to the President regarding the sale of AWACS and F-15 equipment to Saudi Arabia.

Please know that your questions and concerns have been transmitted to the immediate attention of the President's advisory staff for further study and response. You may be assured that we appreciate hearing from you on this important matter.

With cordial regard, I am

Sincerely,

Max L. Friedersdorf
Assistant to the President

The Honorable Mark D. Siljander
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

MLF:CMP:asr

cc: w/copy of inc, NSC Secretariat - for DIRECT response

(with copy to Max L. Friedersdorf).

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July 15, 1981

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President Ronald Reagan
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear President Reagan:

As you are fully aware, the entire Middle East is in an extremely sensitive situation at the moment. As a result, I believe that careful moves should be made with regard to the sale of AWACS and F-15 equipment to Saudi Arabia.

In order that I might better understand your Administration's stand on the AWACS issue, I am respectfully asking for a clarification of your position.

The questions which concern me include:

Is it in the best interests of the U.S. to sell this strategic advanced equipment in light of the fact that sale transfers control?

Will U.S. crews man and operate and control the planes and related equipment?

Will strategic information gathered by AWACS reconnaisance remain only in the hands of U.S. government personnel?

Considering the possibility of insurgence in Saudi Arabia (like the takeover of the mosque last year), what guarantee is there that this vital equipment and information will not fall into the hands of nations or groups unfriendly to the U.S. or to Israel?

Why are we considering giving Saudi Arabia a more advanced reconnaisance system than our friend, Israel, now possesses? Might it not be better to station AWACS in another place, such as the Sinai?

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What assurances has Saudi Arabia given that it will support U.S. policies in the Middle East and toward Israel?

Are there any differences between President Carter's AWACS package and the present package proposed by the current administration?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

/signed/

Mark D. Siljander
Member of Congress

MDS/lgs

cc: Max Friedersdorf

Charlie Pontiello checked w/ Cong.'s office on July 23, 1981